

mumok Museum moderner Kunst
Stiftung Ludwig Wien
Museumsplatz 1, 1070 Vienna

Duration
July 12, 2018–February 3, 2019

Press Conference
Wednesday, July 11, 2018, 10 a.m.

Opening
Mittwoch, 11. Juli 2018, 19 Uhr



1. APRIL 2000, A 1952, © Filmarchiv
Austria

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Photo/Politics/Austria

The exhibition *Photo/Politics/Austria* embarks on a photographic journey through the past one hundred years of Austrian history, using single images and image series that put unique events, historical upheaval, and sociopolitical shifts in a nutshell. Simultaneously, it traces the evolution of photography and the diversity of its formats in which it has been used in the course of these one hundred years.

A series of postcards of the Palace of Justice fire (1927), Ernst Haas's photo series *Returning Soldiers* from 1947, or Heimrad Bäcker's pictorial Mauthausen documentary from the 1970s, Friedl Dicker's montages about the social situation in the early 1930s, or Seiichi Furuya's examination of the border in *Staatsgrenze 1981–1983* serve just as much as building blocks of a visual panorama of Austrian contemporary history as do set photos from the film *Sissi – Die junge Kaiserin* (1956), Barbara Pflaum's retouched master copies of her famous *Wochenpresse* title page of Franz Olah, or Ingeborg Strobl's photo series about the Austrian EU-membership referendum in 1994.

In the exhibition, designed by the artist Markus Schinwald, press photos, artistic works, newspaper clippings, and posters serve as “head images” (Michael Diers) that complement and culminate past “headlines.”

The film theorist and historical philosopher Siegfried Kracauer raised the question of how history can be writable (or describable) in the first place and saw crucial parallels between historiography and photography. In his last, unfinished work, *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (1969), he compared the camera's reality with the reality constructed by historical knowledge: Both reproduce the considered present as an excerpt; both, to Kracauer, blend the spontaneous and the conceptual. He hoped for the emergence of a new perspective from this interplay, a perspective that was neither ideologically tinged nor purely subjective in nature.

Photographs may become iconic, as if representing complex relationships. We may also extract larger historical narratives from *Photo/Politics/Austria's* images from the past one hundred years, which unfold in the architectural setting before visitors like on a colossal leporello. Viewed in sequence, the photographs tell a story of how a nation forged its image, a story of representation and manipulation, of clichés and ruptures, and of their use as propaganda.

An early example of this is Engelbert Dollfuß, the first Austrian politician to use the then-new media to his advantage: He had photos of himself put on posters and was the first whose political speeches were broadcast on the radio. A photo from 1933 depicts the Chancellor on his way to the international economic conference in London. The photo also shows the radio reporter's microphone and the photographer with his camera and tripod.

The year 1956 is represented by an anonymous black-and-white photograph showing Hungarian refugees on their way to Austria. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, these refugees were initially greeted by a wave of solidarity that played an

important role in Austria's collective memory and contributed to its positive stylization as an exceptionally humanitarian nation. The photograph is contrasted with a photo album from the same year that presents set photos from the famous *Sissi* movies as a compendium of private family photos. At the onset of the *Wirtschaftswunder* years, the young republic searched for identification narratives and found them, among other places, in the imperialist-romanticist images of Ernst Marischka's film trilogy. Fiction outperformed historical reality. The nation's image that was forged at the time is still valid today; it has even become Austria's trademark of sorts.

The image (in both senses of the word) of public personalities from politics, culture, and sports has served to strengthen the Austrian consciousness and simultaneously conveys the multiplicity of media where these images were used:

Photo/Politics/Austria shows press photos of Karl Schranz on the balcony above Heldenplatz, Conchita Wurst on the title page of the daily *Kronenzeitung*, or Falco as a wax figure in Madame Tussauds' Vienna branch.

Photography has also been used as both an artistic medium and a medium of a critical accounting of sociopolitical phenomena, for instance by the Austrian artist Ingeborg Strobl: She made the Austrian 1994 EU-membership referendum the subject of a series that unmasked the struggle for majorities, the actions of the campaigning parties, and the significance voters placed in the issue.

One hundred years of Austria are also one hundred years of photography: Much like the republic, the medium has also changed over time: New cameras were being used that allowed for completely new ways of reportage. More efficient printing processes revolutionized the newspaper and magazine market, and international means of distribution broadened the spectrum of available images. All this intensified the significance and presence of photographic images in relation to the written text or hand-drawn illustrations in popular media. The increased use of moving images in news broadcasting and above all the temporal immediacy that is provided by today's transmissions can be regarded as groundbreaking innovations: A massive flow of images in "real time" presents totally new challenges to both the camera operators on location and the newsroom editors.

Photographs are images of real situations or are manipulated to feign real situations. Nonetheless, no photograph—be it journalistic or artistic—has an intrinsic political dimension. Only text and context give it meaning. If, however, it is firmly fixed in our collective consciousness, it shapes our idea of past events.

Photo/Politics/Austria was developed in cooperation with Photoinstitut Bonartes and shows works from mumok's photography collection, complemented by loans from numerous other institutions that reflect the photographic medium's vast range of applications.

Curated by Monika Faber and Susanne Neuburger

Catalogue

Photo Politics Austria, ed. by Monika Faber, Susanne Neuburger – mumok; preface: Karola Kraus; essays by Monika Faber/Michaela Maier, Andreas Lehne, Gerald Piffel, Marion Krammer/Margarethe Szeless; graphic design: Christoph Steinegger, interkool (Hamburg); paper back, approx.. 160 pages; approx. 250 color & b/w ill.; Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln 2018

Exhibition Programme

Curator's Tour: Thurs, November 22, 6.30 pm

Monika Faber (Photoinstitut Bonartes) and Susanne Neuburger
In cooperation with the Vienna Art Week

Curator's Tour: Thurs, January 31, 2019, 10 am

Monika Faber (Photoinstitut Bonartes)

Experts' Talks:

Thurs, Sept 20, 7 pm

Anna Schober (Prof. for Visual Culture, Alpen-Adria Universität Klagenfurt)

Thurs, November 8, 7 pm

Gerald Piffel (Product Management & Historic Archives, APA-PictureDesk)

Thurs, Nov 22, 7 pm

Roland Fischer-Briand (Austrian Film Museum)

Thurs, Dez 6, 7 pm

Gin Müller (Dramaturg, Queer Ar/ctivist)

We wish to thank the mumok sponsors, UNIQA and Dorotheum, and our media partners Der Standard, Falter, Wien live, and Ö1.